Shu Lea Cheang
LOCKER BABY PROJECT
BABY PLAY (2001)
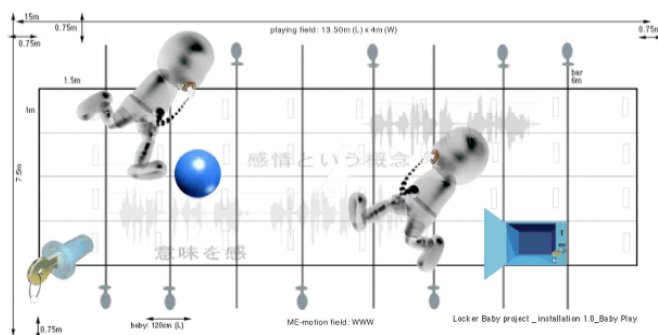BABY LOVE (2005)
BABY WORK (2010)

The **Locker Baby project** conceived in 2001 reflects a time when science is accused of out of control and scifi fantasia fortells a future that is now. The quest for rechargeable robot labor continues, intelligent pets open up new markets and transgenic clones are among us. Versions updated, bodies unwired, behaviours dictated, what remain to be programmed are "memory" and "emotions".

The **Locker Baby project** recalls Ryu Murakami's noted novel Coin Locker Babies (1980) in which twin boys were abandoned at birth in one square foot coin locker metal box at Tokyo's subway station. The boys grew up haunted with the sound of human heart beats, those of their birth mother's. Coin lockers are Japan's train station landmark and much utilized by shoppers and travelers. In post-war japan, unwanted babies (often interracial) by unwed mothers were dropped off in coin-lockers. Fear of terrorists' explosive deposit, coin lockers have ceased to exist at public space in most metropolitan cities. In 1995, when Tokyo Doomsday was called for by cult Aum Shinrikyo, the coin lockers were sealed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Force for a day. The historical association and references derived from coin lockers inspire the Locker Baby project.

The **Locker Baby project** proposes a fictional scenario set in year 2030. The transnational DPT (DollyPolly Transgency) advances clone babies as an industry. Genes extracted from deep sea pearls harvested off Okinawa Island are identified as best breed. Coin lockers situated in busy Tokyo train stations are located for underworld test tube fertilization. Ticking seconds to oblivion in darkness, the lockers announce the birth of the Clone Generation. Serving themselves in the intelligent industry, the locker babies are entrusted to negotiate human "memory" and "emotions". The Locker Baby holds the key to unlock the networked inter-sphere of **ME**-motion (MEmory-eMOTION), a playfield of sonic imagery triggered only by human interaction.

BABY PLAY , the first installment of the Locker Baby project, was commissioned by and realized at NTT[ICC] (Intercommunication Center, Tokyo) in 2001. Baby Play employs a large scale table football field (15m x 7.5m) to link Locker Baby with networked inter-sphere. Table football (termed baby foot in French), a pastime game of the last century, serves as an interface for net interactivity. Opposing rows of ball players (22 in total) are replaced by human sized cloned locker babies (140cm in height). The movement of the ball bounced by the players is tracked by 36 touch sensors that are 'mined' below the floor surface. On the web, 36 lockers, each a depository of texts and sound, correspond to 36 sensor fields. The sensor data of ball movement is transmitted to the web. Accordingly the tracking of ball movement retrieves ME-data (texts and sound) deposited in the respective lockers.
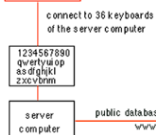
BABY PLAY   Installation photo   NTT[ICC], Tokyo, 2001

BABY LOVE, a Wifi Mobile installation, the second installment of the Locker Baby project, was commissioned by the National Taiwan museum of Fine Arts and first exhibited (curated by Jerome Sans) at Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2005. Baby Love consists of 6 large size (170 diameter) teacups and 6 clone babies (70 cm tall). Each teacup is an auto-driving mobile unit. Each baby installed with a mac-mini is wifi linked to the net depository of popular love songs. Baby Love situates human and its baby clones in a perpetual spin of fairground teacup ride. The teacup ride, its spinning wheel allows direction manoeuver and speed variation, shuffles and remixes the love songs in the baby engine. A gentle ride can turn into fast spin, the data jams and jammed, we are left to sort out the ME with the babies in the swirling teacups. The crash would eventually happen.
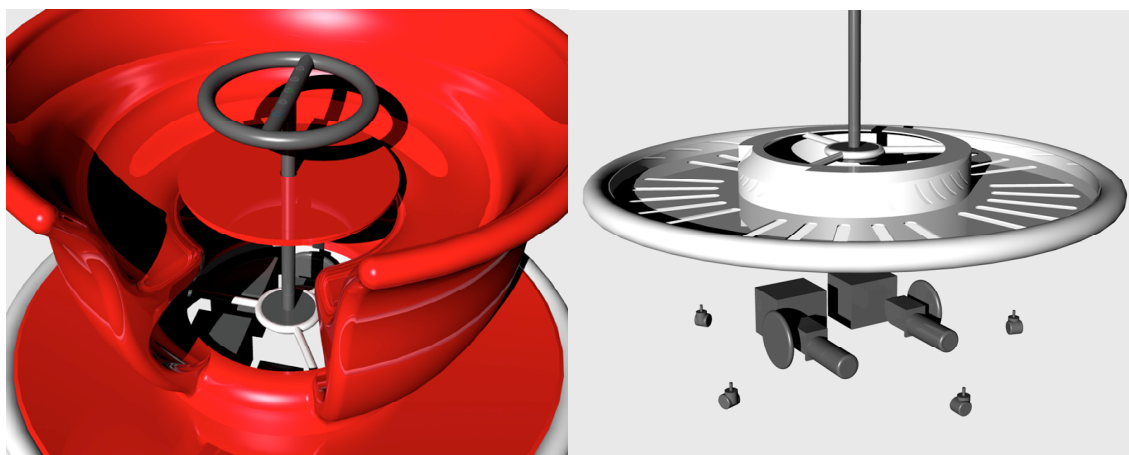
3D design: Hideo Takashima
Industrial design: PoHsien Yang

http://babylove.biz

BABY LOVE   PALAIS DE TOKYO   photo by FLORIAN KLEINEFENN

BABY LOVE –exhibition-2005 to 2008

Palais de Tokyo, 2005
National Taiwan Museum of Art, 2006
ZeroOne Festival, ISEA San Jose, 2006
Chelsea Art Musuem New York, 2006
Experimental playground Australia, 2007
Rogaland Kunstmuseum, Norway, 2008

ISEA-San Jose-City Hall – photos by Everett Taasevigen

BABY WORK, the third installment of the Locker Baby project, is yet to be realized. In 2001 when I conceived the project, I imagined baby work would adapt typewriters as interface. Over the years, as sketches are drafted, it was keyboards and more keyboards -- conveyer belt keyboard third world labor, defunct keyboards, junkyard keyboards. The alphabets and numbers, the keys that connect to ME-data. Ultimately, this is baby work.

YOU ARE BABY…….WORK

Baby Work – Notes on installation design (in development)

Installation elements :
   (1) junk keyboards – to be deposited by the public
   (2) cotton baby doll (1000 unites per exhibition site)
   (3) grabbing machine – grabbing keyboards and babies
   (4) junk sorting machine – preserve keys and babies for conveyer belt
   (5) conveyer belt (site specific – 20m + circular) –sensors + LED lights
   (6) hand gloves with sensors (50 unites)
   (7) speakers – installed beneath the conveyer belt
   (8) time clock system – for check in and out of work

Production team:
   (1) baby designer
   (2) industrial designer (grabbing machine, junk sorting machine, conveyer belt)
   (3) installation engineer (hardware)
   (4) sensor engineer – conveyer belt sensor and hand gloves sensor design
   (5) sound artist – written in Pure Data

Notes on the installation design :
A large exhibition space where a large grabbing machine, a junk sorting machine and a conveyer belt are set up. Announcement is made pre-exhibition for the public to throw away/deposit their unwanted/used keyboards (of computers and typewriters) at the museum. These e-waste (hopefully get much from the public, if not. get them from junkyard) of large quantity are piled up on the exhibition floor. Clone baby dolls (by baby series designer) - made in China, in cotton, in thousands, soft and sweet, are placed among the junk keyboards.

The crane of the grabbing machine sweeps the exhibition floor and picks up baby dolls and junk e-parts. An intelligent junk sorting machine separates the parts, selects baby dolls and keys (of keyboards) and sends them down the conveyer belt.

You are the baby…. WORK! The visiting public are giving sensored glovesand asked to work as assembly line workers along the conveyer belt. By the conveyer belt, each with a glove, one arranges the keys like playing a puzzle game. The task is to re-assemble them back to a computer keyboard. Each placement of a single key on the conveyer belt triggers sounds of typing. The hand gloves with sensor further expand/compose the typing notes into musical arrangement. Collectively, the public as baby workers, constantly recompose a typing symphony which is heard through the speakers set up beneath the conveyer belt. Individually, each baby worker retrieves her/his own ME (memory and emotion) data associated with own electronic/digitalexistence – that of thousands of e-mails, of cyber love affairs, of writing, coding………. Each person is required to work for certain amount of time (10-20 minutes), Work (assemble keys) unfinished is always picked up by the next worker. The baby dolls travel down the conveyer belt is up for grab by the baby workers. A gift.